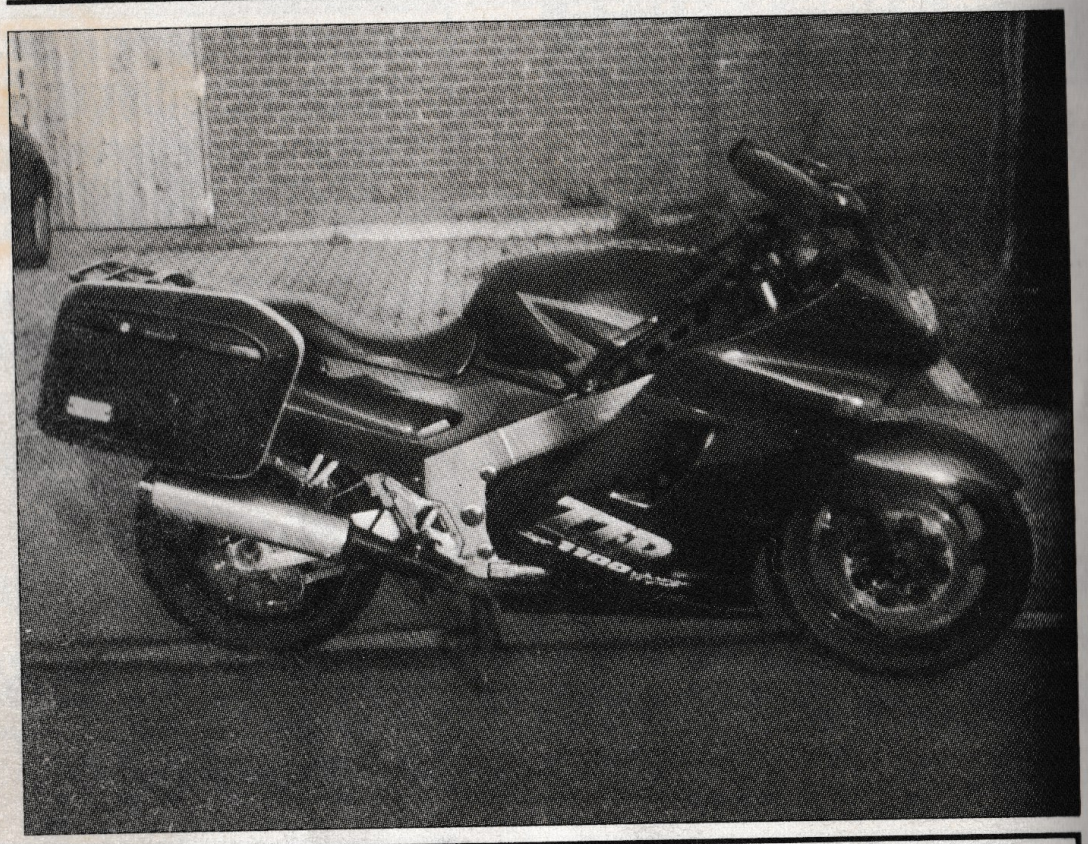


Grand Tourer: KAWASAKI ZZ-R 1100

ONE HUNDRED FORTY SEVEN BRAKE horsepower. Eighty-odd pounds torque. Enough power for 178mph. Across the frame four cylinder twin cam, etc, etc, and actually a 1052 cc engine – but then ZZR1052 isn't very artistic is it?

Look, the details are irrelevant. It's dead reliable, chucks out more power at any speed than you're ever going to use on the road and like most big Japanese bikes you press a button, it starts and does what you want and when you're finished you turn the key off and it stops until the next time. Servicing? I dunno, except it's every 8000 miles. I am told that you can take all the bodywork off and underneath it looks like motorbikes used to. You know, carburettors and stuff. So I suppose if you really want to do that stuff you could?

So, there is. But talking of buttons and switches it reminds me what this bike is like to ride. Let's look at power delivery first. The first thing you notice about the ZZR is there is hardly any throttle movement – no need for a second handful! It's just like moving a switch. Brakes are the same. You want to steer left? Think the bars gently round – just like another switch. Reminds me of computer games. This is the go button, if you want to go faster press the button again. If you want to go faster still, press the button again. Doesn't matter how fast you are already, going just press the button again. Same with the brakes and steering.

Alright, so you are on a big bike that weighs 242kg, or 532lbs if your brain hasn't been converted. And it won't flick around like some lightweight supersports but it's still good enough and with as much stability as you could wish for.

There are, of course, absolutely loads and loads of different tyres you could fit to this bike. And any owner you talk to will have their favourites. But we are talking maximum performance tyres and you will have to decide how you are going to use your ZZR. But if your main use is to be touring then tyres which stick to the road like you know what to the proverbial blanket would not last long enough to get you once round Britain, let alone for a decent European tour. But surprisingly enough tyres are available for the ZZR which will last longer. Bridgestone have been making some lovely rubber of late – even picking up a few awards – and their dual compound tyres really are a very good compromise. They last for ages in the upright and usually silly speed straight line stuff, but nice and sticky on the leaning over scary stuff. Bridgestone Battlax dual compound radials will last up to 8500 miles front and rear when you're riding in the hot sunny long distance tour mode. Bridgestone tyres have the added bonus of being pretty reasonably priced compared to the competition too.

The first thing you notice about the ZZR is there is hardly any throttle movement – no need for a second handful!

So you've had the bike for a few days and you've been out there and got used to it. Next bit is persuading the other half to sit on the back for a spin. Just the same; the extra payload doesn't seem to make any difference. The other half likes it too. Bit of a bonus really, probably because unlike loads of bikes it has a comfy pillion seat as well as the pilot's perch.

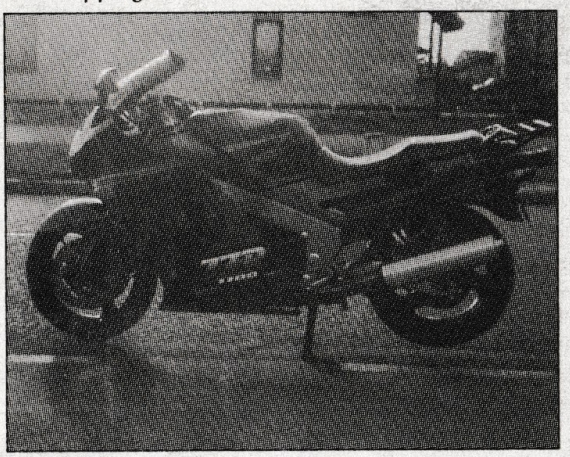
So you load it up for that touring trip which is ultimately what this bike was made for. Whacking great panniers for the kitchen sink, tank bag so big you can't see the dials. Other half on the back. Guess what? Makes no difference!

In the unreal world of a test track of course it probably would. But in the real world you are never going to push this bike anywhere near its limits. It takes it all in its stride.

Here we have a bike that's good for 8000 miles of touring between servicing and tyres. Coupled with good comfort and capability, too.

What about fuel consumption, and how often are you going to have to stop? Let's see, the fuel tank has a 22 litre capacity. That's near enough 5 gallons. But a word of warning, the ZZR doesn't have a reserve fuel switch. In fact it doesn't have one at all. Not to worry, you'll know when you're down to the last gallon or so when the pair of massive great red warning lights on the dashboard start flashing! Back in hot sunny long distance touring mode you should expect at least 45mpg (that's right forty five miles per gallon!) from the ZZR – maybe even more if you have equipped

your pillion with an intercom! So we are looking at 180 miles before the red flashing lights do what red flashing light things do best – be red and flashy. And another bit more before stopping for fuel.



Of course 'spirited' riding will reduce this considerably. But 180 miles sat on the back of a bike hanging on for dear life with nobody to talk to is enough for most pillions, so no complaints there.

The last thing to consider before you set off on your tour is the chain drive to the back wheel. It wasn't so long ago that any serious touring freak would insist on shaft drive for a touring bike. Chains may be pretty good on the race track and in a scientific way they're better for your suspension than a heavy shaft drive, but all that greasing-oily stuff and all the muck over the back end was bad enough, and having to keep adjusting the chain in direct proportion to how fast you went was a right pain. Modern chains with their superior build and O-rings might be well expensive but last ages. Smart people will fit an automatic chain lube system such as the Scottoiler which will mean your chain is just about as maintenance-free as a shaft. It will still make a mess over the back end of the bike though.

Prices for second-hand ZZRs will depend on year and condition. These bikes have been around since 1995 so there's plenty of choice, and with the recent price drops on new Japanese bikes it's probably a good time to buy.

I suppose after all that I've written extolling the virtues of the ZZR I ought to tell you its faults. Can't think of anything at the moment but if I find any I'll let you know.

Steve Bergman / **UBG**